



# MCDHH NEWS

Jane Swift  
**Governor**  
Robert P. Gittens  
**Secretary**  
Heidi L. Reed,  
**Commissioner**

## Heidi L. Reed Appointed New Commissioner



**G**overnor Jane Swift appointed Heidi Reed Commissioner of the Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH) on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2002. MCDHH is a commission, under the Executive Office of Human Services, which serves as the principal agency in the state on behalf of deaf, late deafened, and hard of hearing people. Reed replaces former Commissioner Barbara Jean Wood.

"Heidi Reed brings a wealth of talent and experience to the commission," said Governor Swift. "The administration is pleased to welcome her and is confident that she will provide strong leadership for the commission."

"Heidi's expertise and level of respect among her peers at both the state and federal level will be tremendous asset to MCDHH," said Health and Human Services Secretary Robert P. Gittens. "During her 14 years at D.E.A.F., Inc., Heidi has demonstrated a commitment and a passion for serving the deaf, late deafened, and hard of hearing community, this position will allow her to continue to serve that community well."

MCDHH was established to advocate for, provide and coordinate public policies, regulations and programs to provide full and equal opportunity for deaf, late deafened and hard of hearing people in Massachusetts. The MCDHH is mandated to improve communication accessibility and quality of existing services, to deliver certain specialized services, to promote or deliver necessary new services, and to assist other state agencies in delivery of services to this community. The Commission is also mandated to increase public awareness, determine the extent and availability of services, determine the need for further services, and make recommendations to the Governor.

"I am honored to have the opportunity to continue the Commission's successful efforts which have already brought increased awareness and services to the deaf and hard of hearing population in Massachusetts,"

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We welcome contributions from other organizations, service providers and professionals. Please send them to:  
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# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

JEANNINE DUSOMBRE, GENERAL COUNSEL

## 2002 House & Senate Bills of Interest and Support for the MCDHH

BILL NO.	UPDATE:	SUMMARY
<b><u>S 2218</u></b> (Sen. Mark Montigny)	Bill was enacted and laid before the Acting Governor on July 18, 2002. The Governor signed the bill into law on July 26, 2002 as Chapter 171 of the Acts of 2002.	Provides for human service agencies within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to provide support services to individuals with disabilities and their families
<b><u>S. 230</u></b> (Sen. Antonioni)	Bill referred to the committee on <u>Senate Ways and Means</u>	Further defines the term "free appropriate public education" (FAPE) so as not to permit any changes in the program, placement or services with the adoption of the FAPE standard. As of January 02, the State standard of "maximum feasible benefit" changes to the Federal FAPE standard.
<b><u>S 735</u></b> (Sen. Brewer)	Currently in <u>Senate Ways and Means</u>	Provides insurance coverage for the cost of two hearing aids every three years. <b>See page 7 for details.</b>
<b><u>SB 759</u></b> (Sen. Moore)	Currently in <u>Senate Ways and Means Committee</u>	Requires insurance providers to pay for the costs of providing competent interpreter services.
<b><u>SB 1585</u></b> (Sen. Morrissey)	The bill was enacted on 09/17/02 and laid before Acting Governor Swift on 9/19/02. She signed it and it will go into effect in January 2003.	Allows for people raising or training Service Dogs to assist people with disabilities to have the same rights as an individual with a disability has under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

For more information, visit: <http://www.state.ma.us/legis/>

### Regulation Update

The Commission has re-issued regulations at 112 CMR 6.00 relating to CRIMINAL OFFENDER RECORD CHECKS as final proposed regulations. The proposed regulations require Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) checks for all employees, regular volunteers or trainees or other persons who provide client or support services in programs or facilities of the Commission, or in any vendor agency programs funded by the Commission.

Please visit <http://www.state.ma.us/mcdhh/legis.htm> to read the full text.

## COMMISSIONER HEIDI REED...

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said Reed. "Working with the Governor, the Legislature, and the federal government, I hope to build upon the success of the past and provide leadership and creative initiatives in the future."

Reed has served as the Executive Director of the Developmental Evaluation and Adjustment Facilities, Inc. (D.E.A.F., Inc.) since 1988. Prior to that she was an administrator at Deaf Resource Communication Center in New Orleans. Reed holds a Master's degree in Counseling from Gallaudet University and a Bachelor's degree in English from William Smith College. Ms. Reed also serves as a board member of the National Fraternal Society of the Deaf, a board member of the New England Homes for the Deaf, is a member of the National Association of the Deaf, the Massachusetts State Association of the Deaf, Self Help for Hard of Hearing People and the Association of Late Deafened Adults.

## STAFFING CHANGES AT MCDHH JAMES F. O'DONNELL

**Several staffing changes** have occurred at MCDHH since June 30<sup>th</sup>.

**Karen Higgins** will be joining our senior management team as the **Director of Interpreter/CART Services**. Karen, a certified and court screened interpreter in her own right, has twenty years of experience and education related to interpreting, of which several were in an administrative capacity both at MCDHH and at Deaf Inc. Most recently, she has been the Supervisor of Referral where she worked closely with staff to improve the statewide interpreter and CART fill rate. We are currently waiting for her status to become official, at which point we will be seeking a replacement for the supervisory position that is now vacant. **Lillian Garcia** has returned from maternity leave and now works a four-day week supervising the Staff and contract interpreters. Lillian has many years of experience at Northeastern Interpreting Program and has been with us a year and a half.

**Yvonne Dunkle**, who was both **Director of Quality Assurance** and temporary **Director of Case Management**, resigned from MCDHH to accept the position of Director at the Maryland Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. We wish her much success in this position and are currently seeking to fill the vacant position of Director of Case Management. Presently, Deputy Commissioner Jim O'Donnell is overseeing the functions of the department. There is currently one vacant Case Manager position in Springfield and interviews are scheduled at this time to fill the position. Case Management and interpreters are considered direct service positions and can be filled despite the state hiring freeze. Other positions, however, have been cut outright or remain vacant when staff leaves. The overall staff of the Commission has been reduced from a high of 74 in Fiscal year 00 to approximately 59 positions at present.

MCDHH's **Communication Access, Training and Technology Services Department** lost another position with the recent resignation of Ray Reed, MCDHH's Information Officer. This brings to 5 the number of staff lost in the last several months, leaving three staff in two offices to conduct the agency's public outreach and training programs. We were able to obtain approval to post a composite position for which interviews have just been completed. This position should allow us to expand trainings and offer faster turnaround times on information requests.

## HEARING AIDS

CAROLE ROSSICK

Many people do not get hearing aids even when they need them because they are embarrassed to admit to having a hearing loss. **A hearing loss is much more conspicuous than any hearing aid.** Ask your doctor or call the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association ([www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)) at 800 638 8255 or the American Academy of Audiology ([www.audiology.org](http://www.audiology.org)) at 800 222 2336 for a referral to an audiologist. An audiologist has a Master's or Doctorate degree, is skilled at evaluating the type and extent of your hearing loss and residual hearing, and can prescribe and fit hearing aids based upon the results of your examination, lifestyle and communication needs.

*"Hearing aids are too expensive."* *"I paid a lot of money for this hearing aid that does not seem to work properly."* Hearing aids range in price from about \$700 to \$3500, depending on model, technology (analog, digital or programmable) and features. Analog Behind The Ear (BTE) models



tend to be least expensive, while digital In The Canal (ITC) models generally are very expensive. There is no single "right" hearing aid, nor are digital models inherently "better" than analog models. If money is a factor for you, we suggest trying both analog and digital aids to be sure you actually will get a commensurate benefit from a much more expensive aid. If you don't notice much of a difference, you can save thousands of dollars by going with a cheaper analog aid.

The bigger the hearing aid, the easier it is to manipulate the battery and operating controls. BTE's, because of their size, often come with a telecoil ('T' switch) and direct audio input (DAI), which interface with assistive listening devices and systems (ALDS) to improve understanding in noisy environments. Many cinemas and theatres offer ALD's for their patrons.

Smaller hearing aids, such as in the ear (ITE), in the canal (ITC), and completely in the canal (CIC), consist of plastic shells custom molded to the exact shape of the outer ear and ear canal. Their size may make them difficult to manipulate for people who have arthritis or motor control issues. Their size may affect the availability of a telecoil, and if none is offered you may need to remove the aid in order to use assistive listening devices and systems (ALDS). They tend to cost significantly more than BTE's.

*"I stopped wearing my hearing aids because they did not help me."* Some people wrongly believe that hearing aids correct hearing loss as glasses correct vision loss. This is not the case. Hearing aids will not completely restore your hearing. They will, however, make it easier for you to hear many sounds including speech frequencies, helping you distinguish one word from another, such as "store" versus "shore". Environmental sounds may seem very noticeable or uncomfortably loud when you first start using hearing aids. Adjusting to wearing a hearing aid requires time and patience as you retrain your brain to recognize and understand mechanically amplified sounds. It is best to "break in" your hearing aid gradually and in a wide variety of situations. Simply putting your hearing aid in on day one and expecting to hear perfectly again is a sure way to become disillusioned. A hearing aid is most effective as part of a complete aural rehabilitation program. Plan to visit your audiologist periodically for adjustments and to chart your progress.

MCDHH offers a brochure on Assistive Technology that includes information on assistive listening devices and systems. You can also find out more by visiting the following link: <http://www.state.ma.us/mcdhh/assistive.htm>.

If you know someone else who has a hearing loss, by all means ask them to share their experiences with local vendors and hearing aid brands. You can also call the local Better Business Bureau or the Attorney General's Office of Consumer Protection at (617) 727-8400 to find out if there have been an unusually high number of complaints against a dispenser you are considering doing business with.

## MCDHH AND EOEAL LAUNCH CAREGIVER RESOURCE CENTER, MODEL ADULT DAY CARE PROGRAM AT NEHD

The Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Executive Office of Elder Affairs received a grant from the Federal Administration on Aging to fund a Caregiver Resource Center for Deaf, late deafened and hard of hearing elders. This project includes a pilot Adult Day care program which is located at New England Homes for the Deaf (NEHD). Hours of operation are Monday through Friday from 9:00 to 4:00. Services offered include:

- exercise classes
- arts and crafts
- social times
- games and cards
- meals
- podiatrist
- field trips
- respite care
- cultural events
- a hairdresser and barber visit regularly
- regular church services for a variety of denominations are offered in ASL
- movies
- bingo

The Adult Day Care Program is designed to offer a pleasant, safe and accessible environment for elders to enjoy their day by engaging in constructive activities that promote health, maximum function, high self-esteem and a sense of well-being. The values, history and culture of the Deaf Community are cherished and the program supports full language access. There are 30 residents at NEHD who will join in the activities, increasing the opportunities for social interaction with peers.

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## WIRELESS WORLD JONATHAN O'DELL

It is safe to say the events of the past year have made us all more keenly aware of issues of security and communication. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, there was a dramatic rise in the purchase of devices affording instant wireless communication, both as a way to stay in touch and a way to be alerted to breaking developments.

Of particular interest to deaf, late deafened and hard of hearing people are "interactive" two – way communication devices, whether they be alphanumeric paging/e-mail devices, wireless-enabled laptops, or cellular telephones used with portable TTY's or the new Krown PocketVCO. In many instances, these devices can communicate not only with similar devices but also with fax machines and TTY's, allowing a wide spectrum of users to take advantage of their services. Visit <http://www.state.ma.us/mcdhh/816.htm> for a listing of manufacturers and vendors with direct links to their websites.

Many news organizations, such as [www.CNN.com](http://www.CNN.com), and emergency network providers such as <http://www.emergencyemailnetwork.com> - to name but two of many examples - offer people the option to subscribe to their e-mail lists at no charge so that breaking news is instantly communicated to whatever device and address the user lists in the subscription form. In some instances, the user can personalize these by selecting only those categories of alerts he or she wants to receive, and even further narrow the criteria by choosing only to be alerted to events in the user's region.

Needless to say, this has opened up whole new vistas of communication and convenience to persons who are deaf or live with hearing loss. In many cases, a Deaf or hard of hearing person with such a device and service may find out about an event before their "hearing" peers do, and is

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## WIRELESS WORLD...

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no longer dependent on happenstance and chance encounters to remain informed of events directly affecting them.

There are, of course, caveats to be considered. First among these is that nothing works perfectly all the time. Systems and devices can and do fail without warning – and usually at the worst possible time. Even when they work, there are quite a few areas in Massachusetts (and elsewhere) in which wireless service is spotty or non-existent, owing to marketing demographics and/or geographical features of the particular region in question.

Any number of natural and man-made events can disrupt or destroy these devices or their networks. A powerful winter storm toppling or damaging a cellular tower can result in a “dead” area in which neither cell phones nor two-way pagers work. Such a storm is also likely to knock out power and traditional line-based telecommunications, as anyone who has lived through a harsh New England winter can readily attest to. A large increase in sunspot activity can cause geomagnetic storms that can damage satellites and disrupt communications. Targeted attacks on telecommunications systems, whether by physical sabotage, hacker attacks or brute force (such as the activation or detonation of an electromagnetic pulse [EMP] weapon ), could cause anything from local outages to regional and even national disruption.

The old adage “ don’t put all your eggs in one basket “ still holds true today. Try to think of ways in which you can minimize the impact of any outage or systems failure. Develop a worst-case backup plan that spells out where and by when to meet with your family in the event of a catastrophic regional emergency that renders local or regional telecommunications useless, just as you should have a fire escape plan for your home. Keep spare batteries on hand to prevent “running out” if you are on the road. Invest in a cheap landline telephone that does not require AC power to run, and keep the batteries in your TTY charged so a power failure won’t leave you helpless. Pay your service bills on time, and purchase a protective case or tether to keep your equipment safe from accidental damage. – Then, go out and enjoy the wireless world!

## THINK ACCESSIBILITY

JONATHAN G. O’DELL

MCDHH was established in response to community advocacy which helped legislators recognize the need for accessible services for Deaf, late deafened and hard of hearing citizens of the Commonwealth. One of MCDHH’s primary mandates then as it is now is to provide education, training and technical assistance to promote communication access in Massachusetts.

The Communication Access, Training and Technology Services department at MCDHH does just that. Despite being reduced to just three full-time positions statewide, we presented 118 trainings to 2461 individuals and hosted 26 major exhibits with 4,081 people attending during FY 02.

Accessibility is the law, but it is also simply good business sense. Deaf , late deafened and hard of hearing people are consumers and clients, too, and with approximately 560, 000 persons with hearing loss statewide, anyone who thinks accessibility is not for them is closing the door on a huge, untapped revenue source.

MCDHH believes that proactive education rather than expensive litigation is the key to making our society accessible. If you would like to see what we can do for your organization, give us a call or make a training request through our website at [www.state.ma.us/mcdhh](http://www.state.ma.us/mcdhh). Our services are free, and the benefits of making your business or organization communication accessible are priceless.

## HEARING AID BILL UPDATE

JEANNINE DUSOMBRE, ESQ.

**Senate 735, An Act Providing Insurance Coverage for Hearing Aids** calls for health insurance coverage for hearing aids. *The bill is being resubmitted by Senator Stephen Brewer at the start of the new legislative year in January 2003, at which point it will also receive a different number.*

The bill provides that any accident or sickness insurance policy shall provide coverage for at least two hearing aids every three years.

The bill also states that any policy that purports to cover "durable medical equipment" without specifically stating exclusions, including hearing aids, is considered misleading. In other words, if the insurance policy mentions coverage of durable medical equipment, but then fails to list any exclusion to the coverage and refuses to pay for hearing aids, such policy is misleading and as such would violate the consumer protection law.

MCDHH is also mandated to consult with the Commission of Insurance to ensure the insurance companies comply with the law.

### DISCUSSION for S. 735:

Hearing loss is the second most prevalent chronic public health problem in the United States. As such, hearing loss is exceeded only by rheumatism/arthritis in terms of the number of people affected.

Some time ago, the Legislature recognized the need to impose restrictions on the fitting and selling of hearing instruments in order to protect the public from physical, emotional and economic harm, and established a Board of Hearing Aid Specialists. It deemed regulation of the dispensing of hearing instruments to be necessary in the interest of public health, safety and welfare. Last year, the Legislature passed **Chapter 345**, which provided that certain health plans and policies cover the costs arising from speech, hearing and language disorders. Unfortunately this chapter only covered current and past state employees and is thus anything but comprehensive.

Mandating that all insurance policies cover the cost of hearing aids is a natural and necessary progression to fully addressing the needs of individuals with hearing loss.

### Conclusion:

MCDHH has long argued that hearing loss is a health issue and should be treated as such. We have in the past advocated – and continue to do so – for health insurance companies to pay for the cost associated with the fitting and sales of hearing aids. Senator Brewer's bill fits that need.

## VERIZON UPDATE

JONATHAN G. O'DELL

Several consumers have called us to ask why Verizon was turning down their applications for the Specialized Equipment Distribution Program or not repairing defective equipment originally obtained through this program.

You must be a current Verizon customer to be eligible for the equipment distribution program or to have equipment that you originally obtained from Verizon repaired or replaced.

If you have switched to another local telephone service provider, you will not be eligible to receive equipment or services under this program from Verizon and should ask your current provider to institute a similar program.

## MCDHH AND EOEAA...

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### CARE GIVER RESOURCE CENTER

The center provides caregivers with the support and services they need to sustain the independence and quality of life of Deaf, hard of hearing and late deafened Elders who are living at home. It offers:

- Information, referral and training
- demonstrations of assistive listening devices and assistive technology for hearing loss, low vision, and blindness

All of the staff are committed to promoting a sense of community while respecting individuality, so the participants enjoy a sense of belonging and understanding. Well-being is approached as a mental, physical, spiritual and cultural state.

Contact Debra Lobsitz, Director, at the following address and numbers for more information or a tour.

### Deaf Adult Day Program and Care Giver Resource Center

New England Homes for the Deaf

154 Water Street

Danvers, MA 01923

(978) 774-0445 voice / (978) 739-4010 TTY / (978) 774-0271 Fax

## NEW EMERGENCY CARDS AVAILABLE

JONATHAN G. O'DELL



Patti Medbery, MCDHH's Emergency Service Referral Specialist, has updated MCDHH's "Emergency Cards" to become more legible and consumer-friendly. They are meant to replace the "yellow cards" many consumers still carry with them.

These new Emergency Cards are available at no charge to requesting individuals directly, as well as to agencies, organizations and associations serving Deaf, late deafened and hard of hearing individuals.

To obtain the card(s), please call MCDHH at (617) 740-1600 Voice or (617) 740-1700 TTY and leave a message for Patti Medbery. You can also request cards online by e-mailing us at [MCDHH.Office@state.ma.us](mailto:MCDHH.Office@state.ma.us).

Whether you choose to call or e-mail us, please be sure to give us your full name and your complete mailing address including your zip code. Please also let us know how many cards you would like to receive.

<http://www.state.ma.us/mcdhh>